

# **Indiana Rural Development Council Accomplishments 1998 - 2003**



## **IRDC Prepared Rural Economic Development Strategy:**

Responding to a recommendation by the 1999 Legislative Study Committee on Economic Development, the 2001 General Assembly passed Senate Bill 160, which charged the IRDC with developing a rural economic development strategy to assist Indiana's rural residents in improving their quality of life and to help promote successful and sustainable rural communities. The strategy included goals and recommendations concerning certain issues, which was delivered to the legislature to inform members of the needs of rural Indiana and to assist the general assembly in monitoring issues affecting rural communities and responding to the needs of rural residents. Over 180 rural stakeholders participated in the development of this strategy, which is available on the IRDC website (<http://www.state.in.us/irdc>).

## **IRDC Receives Funding For Rural Communities:**

After delivering the Rural Economic Development Strategy to state legislators in October of 2002, the 2003 General Assembly, in partnership with the Governor's office, created two new rural funding sources (the Rural Development Council Fund and the Rural Development Administration Fund) and appropriated a total of \$3.6 million for each of FY 2003 and 2004. These funds will be utilized to address a variety of rural issues in the areas of economic/community development, planning, leadership, infrastructure, health, telecommunication/education, workforce development, agriculture, and rural regional development initiatives.

## **USDA-Rural Development Awards Certification to IRDC:**

In spring of 2003 the IRDC, along with their other state rural development councils across the nation, applied for federal certification as the official state rural development council for Indiana. This certification is an important component in receiving future federal funds from USDA-Rural Development. In the spring of 2004, Robert White, Indiana State Director for USDA-Rural Development, announced the IRDC had successfully been recognized as the state rural development council for Indiana and would receive \$50,000 as part of that federal certification.

## **Community Visitation Program:**

The Community Visitation Program was a pilot project in 1998, and has been continued as a permanent task force of the IRDC. The Community Visits allow a team of resource providers to listen to elected officials as well as community residents to allow key problem areas and resource needs to surface in an informal, open setting. We have conducted 17 visits to communities ranging in populations from 156 to 10,000. In each of these communities we have found that the needs differ greatly. We provided a handbook to the elected officials reporting not only what we heard

throughout the visit, but also listed the resources available to them if they wish to initiate action on any of these issues.

Communities visited or visits planned include:

- Town of Orleans (1998)
- Town of Marengo (1999)
- Town of Elizabeth (2000)
- Town of Grabill (2000)
- City of Mitchell (2001)
- Town of Albion (2001)
- City of Jasonville (1998)
- Town of Otterbein (1999)
- Town of Bloomington (2000)
- Town of Laurel (2000)
- City of Loogootee (2001)
- City of Greensburg (2002)
- Town of Fowler (1999)
- Town of Borden (1999)
- City of Dunkirk (2000)
- Town of Stinesville (2001)
- Town of Crothersville (2001)

#### **Indiana Housing Assistance Review Team:**

In 1999, the IRDC's Housing Task Force won a Best Practices Award from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for its Housing Matrix of potential funding assistance offered through state and federal government. This group then worked to develop a structure similar to the environmental group that assists communities in researching all of their housing assistance options. Known as IHART, the Indiana Housing Assistance Review Team will help applicants identify partners who can assist in projects providing affordable, safe and sanitary housing. Since its inception, IHART has reviewed 18 housing projects from around the state.

#### **Environmental Infrastructure Working Group:**

Financing of infrastructure projects can become a problem. When looking for assistance, communities can find themselves in a maze of programs. The Environmental Infrastructure Working Group, known as EIWG, has been very successful in helping communities identify potential funding sources for water and wastewater projects. This group consists of representatives of the various state and federal agencies and they meet with communities one on one to discuss all funding options for their projects at one time. This optimizes the efforts of both the communities and the agencies.

Number of communities assisted:

- 1998 -- 32 communities from throughout the state
- 1999 -- 36 communities
- 2000 -- 36 communities
- 2001 -- 20 communities
- 2002 -- 9 communities

#### **Indiana Hosts National Rural Development Conference:**

The 2002 National Rural Development Partnership's Annual Leadership Conference highlighted the wonder and challenge of rural Indiana. The Indiana Rural Development Council functions as one of 40 state rural development councils under this Partnership. This conference offered four full days of activity, and was held in scenic French Lick. Approximately 300 rural leaders from 39 states discussed rural development issues and techniques to address concerns in their home states while being treated to some good ole' Hoosier Hospitality!

### **Formation of Non-Profit Corporation:**

To provide additional options for serving rural Indiana, the IRDC established and incorporated a 501-c-3 non-profit corporation in August of 2000. This additional organization allows the IRDC to provide charitable benefits to its sponsors for donations, and be eligible for special grant opportunities. Two recent grant awards (in 2003) illustrate the important role this non-profit can play for rural Indiana. One example is the award of \$175,000 by USDA-Rural Development, to work with its partners and create a Rural Cooperative Development Center for new and existing cooperatives. The second is the re-activation of a grant award by the Office of the Commissioner of Agriculture to provide technical assistance to tobacco stakeholders and tobacco-based communities.

### **Formalized Work Plans:**

The IRDC has worked diligently to improve the process of developing its annual plan of work. In October of each year, the Governing Board approves the annual work plan, which runs with the calendar year, so that members of the Council can choose which task forces to join. This process has been helpful in meeting the needs of the US Department of Agriculture, which provides the funding for the Council. To review the IRDC's 2004 Work Plan, visit our website at [www.state.in.us/irdc](http://www.state.in.us/irdc)

### **IRDC Involves Youth Members:**

In November 2002, the IRDC membership voted unanimously to add youth members to the Governing Board of the Council. Current board members agreed to recruit high school students from rural communities to serve as full voting members of the Council's leadership. As part of IRDC's tenth anniversary celebration in December of 2003, the Board instituted the "Frank O' Bannon Youth Leadership Associate" position in recognition of the late Governor's service to rural issues. The first recipient of the award went to Stephen Glaspie, a journalist student from Corydon High School. He will serve on the Board for one year.

### **Middletown benefits from IRDC Intern:**

A creative solution to small town needs was the driving force behind the IRDC's intern project. The Council looked for alternatives to accomplish the goal of "hands-on" assistance to local leaders. The result was a cooperative effort using student interns as *community assistants*. Partners included Indiana University's School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA), Cinergy/PSI Energy, the Indiana Department of Commerce and the IRDC.

Middletown, a rural Henry County community of 2,300, was one of many small towns throughout Indiana lacking staff and expertise to fulfill all of the town's functions. Local leaders learned about the internship program and determined that they could benefit from hiring an intern. Middletown contributed \$3,000 to employ an intern approximately 20 hours per week for one year.

### **Responding to Growth of Hispanic Population:**

Another economic development concern is finding workers. In recent years, the influx of Spanish-speaking immigrants to Indiana is impacting our rural communities. In a joint effort to address real issues and further identify potential matters, the IRDC and the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns coordinated the two similar workshops. The "Changing Economies, Changing Cultures" workshops framed an open forum, wherein local and state officials, as well as private entity representatives, discussed common ground and community cohesions while respecting and maintaining cultural diversity.

### **Special Projects:**

*Warren County Economic Development* -- In 2001, a small team of IRDC members traveled to Warren County to meet with leaders and citizens interested in promoting countywide economic development planning. IRDC's team included representatives from USDA-Rural Development, the Indiana Department of Commerce and Agriculture. Since that time, county leaders established the Warren County Local Economic Development Organization (WCLEDO) and hired an executive director as the single point of contact for economic development activities. The Indiana Department of Commerce and USDA Rural Development have announced economic development projects in Warren County. This project combined state and federal funding sources to support expansion of existing industries by extending water and sewer utilities to the industrial park.

*Steuben County Economic Development* – In September 2001, the IRDC worked with the Indiana Department of Commerce and the Wabash Valley Rural Electric Cooperatives to facilitate a meeting of county and municipal officials from Steuben County, as well as other organizations that provide economic development services on behalf of the County. Approximately 35 people attended this session in which long-term and short-term economic development goals were set.

*Downtown Revitalization in Hartford City*—At the invitation of the Mayor and Redevelopment Commission Director, IRDC developed the agenda, arranged for speakers and facilitated a one-half day retreat for the community members concerned about the deterioration of the downtown area of Hartford City.

*State Line Road Project in Union City* – The cities of Union City, Indiana and Union City, Ohio, are planning a reconstruction of State Line Road, the official boundary between the two communities, as well as the two states. IRDC invited partners from the Ohio Rural Development Council and the Indiana and Ohio Rural Community Association Programs to attend the joint city council meetings between the two communities. The IRDC and its partners helped facilitate the meeting in which the communities defined the project and identified potential funding sources to be further explored.

*Dale Chamber of Commerce Retreat* – The Dale Chamber of Commerce was concerned that, with upcoming improvements to State Road 231 through the town, the businesses and residents would be facing changes in this rural community. With the help of the IRDC, the Chamber developed an agenda for a full-day retreat for its Board members and other interested parties within the town to gain community consensus on the issues and potential action steps to help Dale cope with the impending changes.

*Orange County Leadership Retreat* – In June, the IRDC facilitated a retreat of the volunteer Board of Directors of the Orange County Leadership program. The purpose of this retreat was to evaluate past accomplishments of the organization, discuss additional services that could be offered, and identify potential funding to sustain the program.

*Farmer's Market Workshop* – The IRDC participated in the planning and sponsored Farmer's Market Workshop in Madison (March, 2002) with the Southern Indiana Rural Development Project's Agricultural Enterprise Development Task Force. This day-long event was geared toward agricultural producers interested in increasing sales and toward community leaders planning to start, develop and improve community farmers' markets. Over 90 individuals from throughout southern Indiana attended this event.

*Visits to Rural Communities for Specific Needs:*

- Jay County
- City of Scottsburg
- Town of West Baden
- Fulton County Forum
- Tipmont REMC
- Town of Holland
- Town of Glenwood
- Elkhart County
- Harrison County
- Community of Mexico
- Community of New Washington
- Shelby County Leadership
- Town of New Harmony
- Scenic Byways Retreat
- Steuben County
- N. Montgomery School Corp.
- LaGrange Co. Economic Develop.
- Town of Fowler
- Town of Worthington
- Spencer County Leadership
- Town of Stinesville
- Town of Roseland
- Orange County Leadership
- Town of Cloverdale
- Jefferson County

**IRDC Partners on Multi-State Rural Development Conference:**

In August of 2003 the Council of State Governments (CSG) invited Indiana to participate along with CSG and the states of Kentucky and Tennessee concerning a multi-state conference on rural development. Entitled “The Future of Rural...A Multi-State Collaborative Summit on Rural Development” the IRDC was asked to coordinate the planning team representing Indiana. Hosted by CSG in Louisville November 12-14, hundreds of rural development practitioners representing the public and private sectors came together to discuss common issues, challenges and share solutions. While this represented an initial first step in utilizing a regional approach to rural development, conference attendees voiced enthusiasm for future multi-state collaborations.

**IRDC Presentations to Groups:**

- Arizona Rural Development Conference
- Association of Indiana Counties – Annual Conference
- Economic Development Institute – Training Courses
- Federal Legislative Committees
- Historic Southern Indiana – Board of Directors Meeting
- Town of Hope Chamber of Commerce Annual Meeting
- Indiana Association of Cities and Towns -- Annual Conference/Town Roundtables
- Indiana Association of County Commissioners – Annual Conference/District Meetings
- Indiana Association of Regional Planning Commissions
- Indiana Commission for Agriculture and Rural Development Meetings
- Indiana Department of Commerce -- Community Development Workshops
- Indiana Economic Development Academy – Training Courses
- Indiana Land Resource Council Meetings
- Indiana Leadership Association – Annual Conference
- Indiana League of RC&D Councils
- Indiana Legislative Committees
- International Center of Indianapolis – Delegate Visits
- National Rural Development Partnership – Annual Conferences
- Purdue University County Extension Educators – Annual Training
- Rush County Soil and Water/Cooperative Extension Annual meeting

- Southern Indiana Rural Development Project – Annual Symposiums
- US Environmental Protection Agency
- US Department of Commerce – Economic Development Administration
- US Department of Agriculture – Rural Development
- World Rural Women’s Day – International Teleconference
- Governor’s Conference for People with Disabilities
- Ripley County Chamber of Commerce/Ripley County Economic Development Corp. Annual Meeting for Elected Officials

### **IRDC Celebrates Tenth Anniversary:**

The IRDC celebrated ten years of service to rural communities during its annual meeting at the Lebanon Conference Center on December 18, 2003. Even with the cold snowy weather outside, meeting participants were “warmed” by the enthusiastic networking occurring between both old and new friends. Lt. Governor Kathy Davis joined the celebration over the lunch time to make a variety of special presentations including the awarding of the prestigious “Sagamore of the Wabash” to long time board member and supporter of IRDC....Randy Haymaker. Utilizing the conference theme of “Show Me the MONEY...How to Get It/How To Use It” a record number of participants, presenters, sponsors and exhibitors came together to share and learn about the financial resources/technical assistance programs available to rural communities. It was a great way to end 2003 and celebrate with our partners ten years of service to rural communities.